

House Bill 12

By: Representative Cox of the 102nd

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

To amend Chapter 2 of Title 1 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to persons and their rights, so as to prohibit governmental entities in this state from impairing, restricting, or prohibiting a public employee or public school student from verbal expressions relating to the celebration or observance of any public or legal holiday; to provide for legislative findings; to provide for statutory construction; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

Chapter 2 of Title 1 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to persons and their rights, is amended by adding a new Code Section 1-2-12 to read as follows:

"1-2-12.

(a) The General Assembly finds and determines that:

(1) The First Amendment to the United States Constitution provides that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech...';

(2) The rights secured under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution have been interpreted by the courts of the United States to be applicable to the states through the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment;

(3) The United States Supreme Court has held that minors possess First Amendment rights and that students do not 'shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate';

(4) The United States Supreme Court has also held, however, that these rights are not immunized from restriction and that behavior that 'materially disrupts classwork or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of others' may be curtailed by schools;

(5) Article I, Section I, Paragraphs III and IV of the state Constitution provide rights to freedom of religion; and

1 (6) Article I, Section I, Paragraph V of the state Constitution provides the right to freedom
2 of speech.

3 (b) No department or agency of the state and no county, municipality, local board of
4 education, or other political subdivision of the state shall adopt or implement any policy
5 which would impair, restrict, or prohibit a public employee or public school student from
6 engaging in their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression, including, but not
7 limited to, verbal expressions relating to the celebration or observance of any public or legal
8 holiday, as provided in Code Section 1-4-1.

9 (c) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to limit or impair any ability of a
10 department or agency of the state or a county, municipality, local board of education, or
11 other political subdivision of the state to adopt and implement reasonable regulations to
12 prevent unlawful speech or expression, including, but not limited to, behavior which
13 materially disrupts classwork or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of
14 others."

15 **SECTION 2.**

16 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.